

ATTACHMENT 1

ESTABLISH UNIVERSITY-BASED GRANTS TO ASSESS WIC IMPACTS ON PERICONCEPTIONAL NUTRITION

BACKGROUND

The concept for this line of research originated from an FNS-sponsored Institute of Medicine (IOM) workshop/conference entitled “*Health Impacts of WIC – Planning a Research Agenda*” conducted in July 20-21, 2010. The purpose for the workshop/conference was to present and discuss issues related to future priority WIC research topics, methodological challenges and potential solutions in relation to maternal and child health outcomes and costs. Some areas of discussion during this meeting were WIC birth outcomes, obesity, breastfeeding, food insecurity, nutrition education and periconceptional care. FNS recognizes the importance of sound nutrition during the periconceptional period and through this grant process is seeking to further investigate *on a social science research level* how to enhance and document WIC's impact on periconceptional nutrition.

Currently, WIC serves half of the infants in the United States and roughly one third of mothers in their prenatal period. Over half of the pregnant women participating in WIC enroll in their first trimester. In addition, because children may continue participating through their 5th birthday and their mothers may experience a subsequent pregnancy during this time, many families with children maintain a connection to WIC during the periconceptional period.

PURPOSE

FNS announces the availability of funds and a RFA to develop and support a university-based grant series for researcher-initiated projects to demonstrate creative approaches to evaluate the impacts of WIC on periconceptional nutrition.

FNS focus for this project is the direct and indirect effects of WIC participation by one or more family members during the periconceptional period and the implications for service delivery. During the periconceptional period—the time period immediately prior to conception and in the first few days and weeks following conception—nutrition can impact placental and embryonic development with critical lifelong implications. This project shall support a university-based grant series for researcher-initiated projects to demonstrate creative approaches to evaluate WIC impacts on periconceptional nutrition, coordinate activities among researchers, and widely disseminate findings from current research.

FNS does not anticipate any expansion of WIC benefits or increased program costs to enhance direct WIC services in the periconceptional period. However, some features of program operations and service delivery vary across the almost 2000 local agencies, and some existing benefit delivery systems may better support periconceptional nutrition as an offshoot of providing direct benefits to infants and children. It is also possible that there will be some ways to enhance the positive effects of WIC's services on mothers' periconceptional nutrition without increasing WIC benefit costs. The creative approaches to service delivery and evaluation addressed by this Cooperative Agreement shall be based on applying social science research methods on a small scale to demonstrate study designs that can document any effects of WIC on

periconceptional nutrition and identify approaches to further improve WIC's impacts at this critical stage of development.

We anticipate the institution awarded the Cooperative Agreement ("recipient") will:

1. Develop and administer a competitive process to solicit, evaluate, and fund nationwide sub-grants for researcher-initiated projects on the impact of WIC nutrition education.
2. Coordinate efforts among the sub-grantees.
3. Assess the findings from the sub-grantees' evaluations of WIC's impact on nutrition.
4. Produce a summary and synthesis of these and related efforts (such as a meta-analysis on the results) and widely disseminate this information.
5. Sponsor and coordinate a workshop/conference on observations and findings. The cooperative agreement application and the proposal shall provide a preliminary list of the types of people that will be invited to participate in the workshop/conference. Sub-grantees shall attend and actively participate in this workshop/conference. The Recipient shall prepare and publish a summary of this workshop/conference within 6 months of the event. Each project description in the workshop/conference summary shall include a description of the types of deliverables that will be submitted and/or published by each subgrantee.
6. Provide FNS for internal use and informational purposes with an electronic copy of all manuscripts resulting from this grant and its subgrants at the time of submission for publication and in final form when published.

The recipient and the subgrantees shall provide FNS with recommendations for cost-neutral approaches to improving WIC's impact on periconceptional nutrition and an estimate of the cost-benefit associated with these impacts.

Some examples of the type of subgrantee research projects that USDA is hoping to elicit might be:

1. A non-WIC eligible woman who comes in 4 times a year to the local WIC clinic for her child or children to receive WIC food, nutrition education and referrals. This may present the opportunity to gain knowledge on periconceptional nutrition care without changing the focus on the child. For example, nutrition education on fruits, vegetables and whole grains for the certified child WIC participant may have potential nutritional benefits for the mother's next pregnancy if she also increased consumption of these foods throughout the periconceptional period. This allows not only the WIC participant child to gain improved nutrition, but the mother as well without substantively changing the focus of the child's nutrition session. It is possible that the structure of nutrition education for WIC child participants at some agencies already does a better job of simultaneously promoting improved nutrition for the child's mother. Likewise, it might be possible to test whether nutrition during the periconceptional period varies between women who keep all of their scheduled appointments and those who don't.
2. Current WIC benefits include referral to other programs and social service sites (such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [SNAP, formerly known as the Food Stamp Program], Medicaid, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [TANF] and, when needed, food banks/food pantries). The literature on hunger in the U.S. (referred to

as food insecurity) indicates that mothers in food insecure households will reduce their food consumption (quantity and variety) and eventually skip meals or go entire days without food in an effort to protect the children in the household from food limitations. In such situations, a mother may be in her next periconceptional lifestage unknowingly and reduce her own consumption to protect her preschool child from skipping a meal. Therefore, WIC's current contributions to preventing food insecurity from impacting the participating child could be preventing some mothers from reducing their own consumption thereby improving periconceptional nutrition. Different approaches to the referral component of WIC benefits could have dramatically different impacts on household food security and therefore different impacts on periconceptional nutrition.

FNS involvement with the recipient will be to:

1. Approve the final RFA for the subgrantee competition issued by the university “recipient”.
2. Provide comments on the recipient’s plans to announce the competition.
3. Provide comments on a recipient-provided list of all applicants for the competitive subgrants (the recipient-provided list shall include the principal investigator(s), institutional affiliation(s), and summary of the applicants proposed objectives and methods).
4. Review of a recipient-provided list of all awardees of the competition (including subgrant title, dollar amount of the sub-grant, contact information for the principal investigators, brief narrative description, project time frame and expected products).
5. Approve the date, location, and time of the workshop/conference.
6. Review and comment on the workshop/conference agenda.
7. Review and comment on recipient-provided dissemination plans.

The recipient will verify the Excluded Parties List to determine the, <https://www.epls.gov/>, federal debarment and suspension status of applicants before awarding a subgrant.

Evaluation Factors and Criteria - *Total Possible = 100%*

An application that combines responses to multiple attachments will be rejected. Independent applications are required to apply on more than 1 attachment.

The evaluation criteria and weights are detailed below:

Research Merit – Suggested work has relevance to USDA WIC program and policies and is likely to further advance knowledge *on a social science research level* of how to enhance and document WIC's impact on periconceptional nutrition. **(25%)**

Overall Approach – Quality of proposed plans for conducting a competitive process to: solicit and award researcher-initiated sub-grants; to coordinate activities among researchers; widely disseminate findings; sponsor a conference; and approach to ensuring subgrantees have good working relationships with WIC agencies. **(25%)**

Feasibility – Overall approach is reasonable and appropriate while demonstrating: experience and ability in the areas of periconceptional nutrition and research: coordination of efforts among multiple research organizations; capacity to follow up with progress and financial reports to

ensure the subgrantees are on track; and safeguards that no subgrantee is disbarred or suspended from federal government sponsored work. **(25%)**

Staffing/Budget/Timeline – The budget shall be consistent with objectives and timelines. The amount of funds allocated for staffing and activities shall be reasonable based off the procurement strategy. The competitive subgrantees, collectively, shall receive no less than 51 percent of the total amount awarded to the Recipient. **(25%)**